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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 BEIRUT 000426

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NSC FOR ABRAMS/DORAN/MARCHESE/HARDING

E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/22/2027  
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [PGOV](#) [LE](#) [SY](#) [SA](#) [FR](#)  
SUBJECT: FRENCH AMBASSADOR ON LEBANON DEVELOPMENTS

Classified By: Jeffrey Feltman, Ambassador, per 1.4 (b) and (d).

SUMMARY

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11. (C) In a 3/22 meeting with the Ambassador, French Ambassador Bernard Emie expressed concern that, with the departure of French President Jacques Chirac, France will lose its only strong advocate for Chapter VII approval of the Special Tribunal. The "entire French bureaucracy" is against proceeding in that direction, he commented, although Chirac recently assured March 14 leaders that, if necessary, he will work with President Bush on a Chapter VII approach. Emie agreed that arms smuggling across the Syria-Lebanese border was one of the most dangerous risks to UNSCR 1701, and he advocated using an April 2 visit to Lebanon by German Chancellor Merkel to endorse and expand the German pilot program on the border. UNSYG Ban Ki-Moon's March 30 trip should also highlight border issues, Emie agreed, perhaps by using the visit to emphasize again the language in the UNSCR 1701 report. While evincing little enthusiasm, Emie promised to support a contact group meeting on border concerns in mid-April, although he mused about whether the contact group should postpone its session until after hearing from a UNSC experts' trip to the border. Comparing notes on local developments, the two ambassadors had largely the same information and impressions, with Emie particularly fixated on security threats. While not providing supporting evidence to explain his worries, Emie expressed deep concern about Egyptian-Saudi contacts on Lebanon and Syria, wondering if the two Arab countries were about to make a deal at the expense of the international consensus on Lebanon. End summary.

EMIE WORRIED THAT, WITHOUT CHIRAC,  
CHAPTER VII BECOMES MORE DIFFICULT

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12. (C) French Ambassador Bernard Emie and Ambassador Feltman compared notes on 3/22. Emie expressed satisfaction with the prospects in New York for extension of the UNIIIC. But "very soon" the French and the U.S. are going to have to engage at the highest levels regarding what to do about the Special Tribunal for Lebanon. French President Jacques Chirac, meeting with Saad Hariri, Walid Jumblatt, and Samir Geagea in Paris separately, recently told them that Chapter VII should be the last resort, pursued only after all constitutional Lebanese routes have been exhausted. But Chirac also promised that he would work with President Bush on promoting a Chapter VII solution, if that were truly the only way forward. The March 14 leaders thus negotiate from a

position of strength, in knowing that Presidents Bush and Chirac will help push Chapter VII, if all else fails.

13. (C) The trouble, Emie mused, is that Chirac is leaving office soon. The "entire bureaucracy" below Chirac, except for Emie himself, is against using Chapter VII. So the new French presidential team will take office, with the natural inclination to think that the predecessor's policies are flawed, with "everyone except me" whispering that Chapter VII is a bad idea. The French bureaucrats' arguments against Chapter VII are threefold: first, success is not assured; the Russians may very well veto, "leaving us with nothing." Second, Lebanon's security will certainly be affected adversely, as Syria and its allies react to Chapter VII by murder and mayhem in Lebanon. Third, the entire process, "as (UN/OLA chief) Nicolas Michel tells us," will take a very long time, with the UN forced to redraft the tribunal documents. In fact, given the possibility of procedural delays and requests for clarification, the Russians could stall for time and essentially derail the tribunal without having to resort to use of their veto. "I worry," Emie concluded, that "we (implicating the U.S. in his statement) have raised expectations we cannot meet" regarding Chapter VII. The Ambassador agreed with Emie that the serious French-U.S. consultations on Chapter VII possibilities need to continue, but also reminded Emie that many previous Lebanon resolutions were initially thought impossible to achieve. "Yes, but we had Chirac," Emie said.

#### CHIRAC'S MESSAGE TO MARCH 14 LEADERS

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14. (C) Emie briefed the Ambassador on Chirac's meetings with Hariri, Jumblatt, and Geagea. These had derived from private

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conversations Chirac had during the reception he hosted in awarding the Legion d'Honneur to Saad Hariri on 3/18. While they were indeed separate meetings lasting about half an hour each, they were set up at the last minute, "en passant," which explains how Geagea in particular was received by the French president. ("The Aounies are going nuts," Emie chuckled.) There were "no surprises" in the meetings, although Hariri told Chirac that he was worried about the Saudis and Egyptians making some deal behind everyone's back with Syria regarding Lebanon. Chirac made the same four points to all three visitors: 1) The UNIIIC report indicates that Serge Brammertz is zeroing in on Syria, and Lebanese figures need to be particularly careful regarding their security. 2) Nabih Berri is a tricky character, and the March 14 politicians need to stay united and on guard against any traps. 3) The National Unity Government is a Lebanese matter, and France will defer to the Lebanese on what makes sense in terms of cabinet portfolios. 4) The Special Tribunal is a red line for France that cannot be compromised or canceled. While France is willing to help in terms of Chapter VII, you must proceed domestically on all tracks first.

#### EMIE WORRIED ABOUT SECURITY SITUATION

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15. (C) The two ambassadors discussed domestic developments in Lebanon, confirming that each had more or less the same information and same impressions: that the Berri-Hariri dialogue did not appear to be heading for a break-through before the Arab Summit, and that the March 14 leadership, after several days of bickering between Jumblatt and Hariri, had come together again. Emie said that he was deeply concerned about the security situation in Lebanon and expected bombings and assassinations to resume. (As if on cue, the meeting was at this point interrupted by Emie's secretary bringing news of the explosive device discovered

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and defused at the American University of Beirut.) He noted

a "new aggressiveness" by the Iranian-funded al-Akhbar newspaper against France and against Emie personally. His explanation was that al-Akhbar was participating in a Hizballah effort to silence the French by frightening them about their extensive footprint, including UNIFIL, in Lebanon. Emie outlined a large number of security concerns regarding his Embassy's posture, UNIFIL positions, and French cultural, educational, and commercial establishments in Lebanon.

USING UPCOMING MERKEL VISIT  
TO PUSH GERMANS ON BORDER PROJECT  
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16. (C) The Ambassador raised with Emie the serious problem of arms smuggling across the Syrian border, arguing that the SYG's 1701 report gives us a new opportunity to push for aggressive action. Emie agreed that arms smuggling remains one of the most dangerous issues with the potential to unravel what stability exists in Lebanon. But he cautioned the Ambassador to "be realistic" when it comes to what the Siniora cabinet is capable of requesting. And a replacement cabinet might be even less inclined to look at this problem than Siniora's government. Instead of "overburdening" Siniora, Emie suggested that we should use a proposed April 2 trip to Lebanon by German Chancellor Angela Merkel to highlight the German pilot program. Perhaps there is a way to use Merkel's visit to get the Germans to agree to quicker implementation and expansion of the project, Emie mused, promising to think how in the European context to push this forward. "If the Germans make a big show of offering more help, would Siniora say no?" The Ambassador also noted that UNSYG Ban Ki-Moon's March 30 trip to Lebanon also offers an opportunity to reinforce the need to make progress on this issue. Maybe we can use Ban's visit to emphasize again the relevant language in the 1701 report. Emie agreed. Emie also welcomed the idea contained in the UNSCR 1701 report calling for a UNSC fact-finding mission to the Syrian-Lebanese border.

CONTACT GROUP: LUKEWARM WELCOME  
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17. (C) The Ambassador also noted the importance of the contact group to meet as planned no later than mid-April. Emie listened to the Ambassador's arguments, finally answering by asking "why not?" "It can't hurt" to compare

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notes informally via the contact group on how to address the arms smuggling issue, Emie said. He noted that "we have a duty" to show the Israelis "before they act unilaterally" that "we are taking the smuggling issue seriously." Pushed by the Ambassador, he eventually promised (albeit it without much enthusiasm) to send word to Paris supporting the contact group idea, and wrote a note to himself. Later in the conversation, however, Emie returned to this topic, with hints that he was having second thoughts. Maybe, Emie said, "it would make more sense" for the contact group to meet only after the visit by the UNSC fact-finding mission. That could be the action-forcing event. The Ambassador disagreed, saying that we needed to start comparing notes sooner rather than later. The Ambassador also noted that the contact group should not be a one-time meeting, but rather be a series of ongoing consultations on a most urgent problem.

CONCERNS ABOUT SAUDI, EGYPTIAN PLANS  
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18. (C) Finally, in closing the meeting, Emie told the Ambassador that, following up on what Saad Hariri said to Jacques Chirac, "we need to watch carefully" what the Saudis and Egyptians are up to. The Ambassador, noting that he had seen Saudi Ambassador Khoja the previous day, asked for clarification of Emie's concerns. Not going into detail, Emie said that he had seen "worrying signs" that the

Egyptians and Saudis might be colluding on issues regarding Lebanon in a way that includes Syria but undermines the international consensus regarding Lebanese sovereignty and independence. "We need to watch this," Emie warned ambiguously. "I'm not comfortable with what I know, and I'm not comfortable with how little I know."

COMMENT

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19. (C) With everything else going on in Lebanon, we had not focused on the upcoming Merkel trip. We agree that this would be an excellent vehicle by which to push forward Germany's pilot border project. We will engage Prime Minister Siniora to see if he can ask for faster implementation and broader geographic scope, but -- in case he declines (and, even if he tells us he will consider the idea, who knows what he will actually say in the meeting with Merkel) -- we hope there is a way to suggest to the Germans that, in light of the UNSCR 1701 report, they publicly announce an acceleration and expansion of their program. On the contact group idea, Emie's positive-sounding words were in contrast to the lack of excitement displayed on his face. Frankly, our impression was that he had not given the contact group idea much thought, even though we have raised it with him before (and surely he has seen reporting regarding U.S.-French discussions in Paris, Washington, and New York on the subject). But he gave us what we needed: enough of a positive response -- and sincere acknowledgement of the problem -- that we can go back to him to ask for further help, should Paris continue to try to stall on getting the contact group together. We were struck again in this meeting by how worried Emie is about security for his mission and French UNIFIL troops, fears that will probably make him more, not less, cautious in pushing for real efforts regarding the Syrian-Lebanese border issues.

FELTMAN